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FRIDAY SEMINAR AT DSHS WILL DESCRIBE EFFORT TO RETOOL HEALTH CARE FOR 21ST CENTURY

OLYMPIA, Wash. – A national authority on a far-reaching federal act that will dramatically change the way the nation's health-care system exchanges information will be in Olympia on Friday, September 21, to brief Washington state workers on the law and its likely impact on state government systems.

Wes Rishel, an executive with the Gartner Research Group and an expert in health-care information systems, will speak at 9:30 a.m. in the basement auditorium of Office Building 2, headquarters of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The 90-minute presentation -- dubbed "Wrapping, Mapping and Hacking" -- will include time for questions and answers.

The law, known as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPAA, was passed in 1996, but included long-range provisions for phased-in changes beginning in 2002 that will simplify and consolidate the different coding and formats used by today's health plans and providers.

Thanks largely to noncompliant computer systems, more than 25 cents of every health-care dollar in the United States now goes to administration, and HIPAA's "administrative simplification" changes were drafted with the goal of reducing that figure to as low as 5 cents.

The changes will require compliance by every level of health care, from doctor's offices and even home-care providers to clinics, hospitals, and health plans, including government payers like Medicaid and Medicare. Affected state agencies in Washington include DSHS, the Department of Health, Labor and Industries, the Health Care Authority, the Department of Corrections, and several others.

The transaction, or coding, changes will be followed in subsequent years by new procedures and systems to safeguard patient privacy and ensure full security in an all-electronic exchange of medical claims, bills, payments and patient records.

Rishel's Friday presentation will be free and open to any HIPAA government or private representative involved or interested in HIPAA compliance.